

"Turning the Tide" Project focuses on mangrove and coral reef restoration to preserve nature and the environment

L MEDIA PRODUCTION
BUBBLEBUBBLES FOUNDATION
STANDSE MUSIC COMPOSED BY MARTIN BUITENWEG
HENKENS, SIETSKIE VAN DER WAL, GIANDARLOTTI, ILLES
D VOICEOVER BY ROSABELLE ILLES



Page 11

Pinchos Grill & Bar

Now in its 20th plus year, owned and run by a local family.

Open 7 days a week, as of 5:00PM
Full Service Bar
Live Music on weekends

Reservations: (297) 583 2666 or reservations@pinchosgrillaruba.com



"Turning the Tide" Project focuses on mangrove and coral reef restoration to preserve nature and the environment

Recently, the Aruba Conservation Foundation (ACF), in collaboration with local partners Scubble-Bubbles Foundation, the University of Aruba, and international partner Wageningen University & Research, launched a documentary about the Turning the Tide project. This project started more than a year and a half ago, and René Henkens of Wageningen University & Research shared details with Aruba Today about how the project began, its goals, and the results achieved so far.

Project Background and Objectives

Henkens explained that preparations for the project began in 2022. Recognizing that little research and restoration efforts were being conducted on nature conservation, the project was launched when the Resenbit initiative provided substantial funding from the European Union (EU). The entire project focuses on the restoration of mangroves and coral reefs.

For the mangroves, one of the biggest challenges is sedimentation. Henkens explained that during heavy rainfall, large amounts of sediment flow down from hills into the mangrove system, causing it to turn into land, which leads to the loss of mangroves.

To restore the mangroves, sediment traps were installed at the end of Rooi Taki, Rooi Bringamosa, and Rooi Lamunchi. These traps, with a capacity of 500 cubic meters, prevent sediment from flowing into the mangrove areas.

In addition to the sediment traps, mangrove channels were created in Spaans Lagoen to restore tidal movement. Currently, tidal flow is limited due to sediment blockage. The goal is to restore fresh water movement to help mangrove trees grow again once the channels are fully established.

Once this is achieved, the nursery function of the mangroves will be restored, allowing fish populations to increase, benefiting local fishermen.

Coral Reef Restoration Efforts

Regarding coral reefs, Henkens emphasized that many reefs are dying or already dead. The project introduced two types of artificial coral reefs:

Moses Reefs – These are Lego-like



concrete blocks that can be used to build various reef structures. The project has installed 13 of these reefs, consisting of 400 blocks in total.

MARRS Reefs – These are spider-like structures built locally in Aruba. Volunteers coat them with a non-toxic adhesive and cover them with Aruban white sand before placing them in the ocean.

These artificial reefs were transported to three specific locations along Aruba's southern coast. The goal is for coral to grow on these structures and form new coral reefs.

Current Results and Future Outlook

Henkens explained that the project involves continuous monitoring of mangroves and coral reefs alongside conservation and restoration efforts. Research and monitoring are carried out by students from the University of Aruba and Wageningen University.

After one year of monitoring, it is still too early to determine the exact results. However, during a recent visit to one of the reefs, researchers observed that the corals had already doubled in size.

Despite coral bleaching events last year and the impact of Hurricane Beryl, corals at a depth of just two meters managed to survive.

"This gives us hope, but we cannot yet declare the project a success. However, we are pleasantly surprised by how well the corals are responding," Henkens emphasized.

He estimated that it would take three to five years to see significant results, assuming the coral survives.

Community Involvement and Environmental Concerns

Giancarlo Nunes, Research Conservation Manager at ACF, stressed that the project's success also depends on the Aruban community and how people behave around the coral reefs.

"It's crucial to keep our waters clean, avoid dropping anchors on coral reefs, and take measures to ensure their long-term health," he emphasized.

To help the community contribute to conservation, Henkens suggested: Taking better care of private

land to prevent erosion, as erosion is highly destructive to mangroves, seagrass beds, and coral reefs. Ensuring higher water quality, which is essential for ecosystems to withstand climate change. Henkens also highlighted the major role of wastewater treatment plants in this issue. He specifically mentioned that Bubali Plas is an environmental disaster and that an urgent solution is needed.

He also pointed out that new hotel developments have a massive impact on the environment. Since the existing sewage treatment plants are already at full capacity, adding more hotels would put even greater strain on the system, leading to devastating consequences.

Furthermore, he stressed the importance of stopping mangrove destruction and being mindful of nature.

"Think about sustainable solutions, conduct proper environmental impact assessments before any project, and make sure Aruba's nature is taken into account," Henkens urged.

He criticized previous impact assessments for focusing only on the hotel site itself, without considering what hotel guests would do during their stay.

"Visitors will impact the environment. They will go swimming, possibly use jet skis, yet there are no regulations in place for these activities," he pointed out.

Environmental conservation and nature preservation are ongoing battles. Henkens emphasized that this should not be the case, as reckless destruction of Aruba's environment will eventually leave nothing behind. □

